

vessel



'Editorial'

This was a labour of love and a labour of hate. In editing, something is always lost, and something is always gained. I love to win and I hate to lose. Working with these writers, I learned a great deal about the myriad ways we try to create understanding (and misunderstanding) through the written word.

Editing is an ongoing conversation, a process, and a negotiation.

This small underground journal is a vessel for these writers and their work, in humour and beauty. In this process I myself have felt like a vessel. You know what I mean? I won't be elaborating, so I hope you do.

One of the writers (I won't specify, so it could be any of them or none, as through lack of specification I could be constructing fiction, though I'm not) told me that writing their piece might have made them believe in God again, and then they said Fuck you. That meant a lot to me.

Enjoy and thanks very much,
Anastasia

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‘There are mezuzahs everywhere for those with eyes to see’

On the doorpost of every Jewish home and some doorways inside them you will find a mezuzah. You’ve seen one before. Maybe you’ve kissed your fingers after touching the mezuzah. The mezuzah is not the anti-Kinder egg – rather, the anti-mezuzah is not the Kinder egg – the anti-mezuzah is the Lego Batman Minifigure Happy Meal Toy. On the way home from an action, my ex-Chabad comrade tells me that my idea reminds them of something. According to many mystics, G-d must conceal themselves in order to create. Here’s how I ended up smelling like fertilizer:



An astonishing commodity. At time of writing, the Kinder website claims that a Kinder Surprise has ...three happy experiences in one little egg: the delicious milky taste of quality Kinder chocolate, a little toy and a big moment of surprise! The surprise is the largest and most important part of this commodity. Even the chocolate is *milky*, i.e. not real chocolate! In his 2003 article for Cabinet, *Human Rights in a Chocolate Egg*, Žižek explains that the surprise in the middle of the Kinder Surprise Egg is pure surplus; something you get ‘for free’ while simultaneously being the reason for the purchase – no one actually wants the toy inside or the chocolate, and this imbues the chocolate casing around the experience of the surprise with mystical commodity powers.

Žižek takes the surprise of the egg to be the perfect representation of Lacan’s *objet petit ‘a*, which he argues all commodities are to some effect. He draws a line through history of voids and commodity fetishism, from the Greek vase encompassing a void to the Kinder egg of the present, surmising that:



It is as a commodity that a thing is not only itself but also points “beyond itself” to another dimension, which is inscribed into the thing itself as a central void.

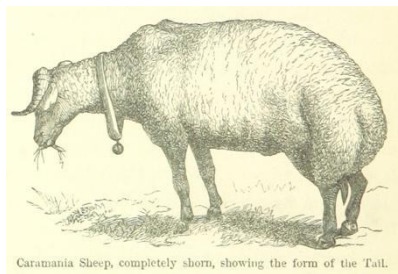
He goes on, comparing the vase and the egg:

In both cases, we are offered the surface form deprived of its core.



Žižek laments the state of modernity, marveling at how far we have fallen – from vases to Kinder Surprise Eggs. I don’t know about all that. I feel like Kinder Eggs can be at least as culturally impactful and enjoyable as a vase. So what if something is a copy? So what if it is new? Why does an object’s proximity to ‘authenticity’ matter? An object can be what is, is as it is. Except for when it can’t, because it isn’t.

Mezuzahs are made of two parts – a cylindrical casing (please see my big gay mezuzah on right for reference), inside of which there is a prayer written on *klaf*, which is parchment made from the hide of a kosher animal. The prayer contained within is the *Shema*, which affirms Jewish faith and the One-ness of G-d. It is widely considered to be the most important prayer in Judaism.



Caramania Sheep, completely shorn, showing the form of the Tail.

My housemate is a horticulturalist and our backyard often smells of fertilizer; we have a beautiful yard. When returning from the cemetery Jews must avoid entering through the front. I came back from a funeral once through this sliding door and the smell of fertilizer sinks into my memories of death. We don't have a mezuzah here. Wash your hands now. Wash your hands when you wake.

There are extremely specific commandments around scribing on *klaf*. It is not permitted to write prayer or any of the names of G-d on the flesh side. While **I'm on the phone** to my *most observant friend*, I am convinced that the sages are telling us something important. I think we have enough information for me to make my argument, and we'll get back to the sages and



fertilizer later. If you recall, old mate said that the commodity is "...the surface form deprived of its core." Meanwhile, Mezuzahs are the core only, but the core concealed. The surface form is one of the things being 'pointed to' by the core, *as well as* another dimension – not the void, the divine. The casing is the mezuzah pointing back at itself, not to be self-referential, but to affirm itself.

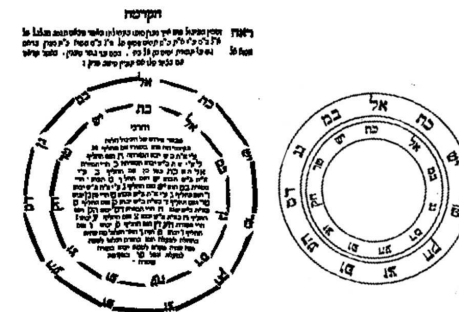
At work, we sell purple Pokémon 512GB SD cards with Gengar, the Ghost Pokémon on them. These work for a camera or a phone, but no one will use them for this purpose. SD cards on games consoles don't get taken in and out of the device, they are viewed once and then inserted, never to be seen again. The new Nintendo Switch 2 takes Micro SD Express cards, meaning that Gengar cannot be used when customers upgrade. It sits in the dark, encased by the Switch. The function served by Gengar here is that of an inscription on *klaf*. The *Shema* is not all you'll find on an Ashkenazi mezuzah scroll, though.



I visited a Mormon temple before it was consecrated and it was covered in mirrors that faced each other I asked my friend he said they were to remind us of the Infinite

So. On the other side of the *klaf* we have an inscription.

We *do*!



Yes! On the flesh side, in the gaps between the lines of the *Shema*, there is a Ceasar cipher containing the three names of G-d mentioned in the prayer on the hair side. Each letter *just* touches its 'opposite'. So, why do we do this? There is a clear prohibition against writing on the flesh side, let alone the names of G-d! Sephardi don't do it, they say it's an abomination!

I've found it. I'll send you the link.

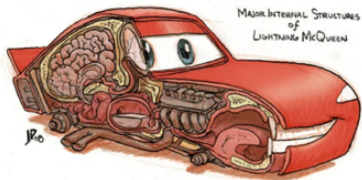


This doesn't tell me why we do this. This is just some rabbi in the 1500s saying that we have been doing this for a while already!

Yeah. He says we do this.

But why!

That's big kabbalah. You're not grounded enough. Yeah, you'll fucking spiral.



Concealment is the difference between mezuzahs and other objects. The engine of a car is not concealed, it happens to be hidden, but it can be heard, it makes the car go.

My dear friend and housemate has a government name he was born with; and now lives and goes by a new name that he chose. Eventually, he plans to change his legal name to a third name, something no one will call him but the State. This third

name will replace the current legal inscription and fulfill the function of never being seen or used. He doesn't believe in deadnames. I remember sitting in the appeals court hearing a list of names I'd never heard for people I was arrested with, people I knew well, and deciding to change mine. I can't be known to this magistrate and my comrades by the same sounds.

Concealment, for certain objects and non-objects, allows them to function, and sometimes makes them sacred. But this sacredness does not come from the separation of the not-sacred, it comes from a redirection by the concealing material back inwards toward the hidden object.

In the case of the Ashkenazi mezuzah, my contention is that placing the *Shema* in conversation with itself on the *klaf* is like placing two mirrors in front of each other; in this way, the prayer reflects into itself infinitely – infinity is the One and the One is affirmed in the *Shema*, One-ness is affirmed. The names of G-d themselves are concealed in code, concealed on the back of the parchment, concealed again inside the casing of the mezuzah, and this concealment also echoes infinitely by way of the reflection. These are sacred concealments that reverberate throughout the One, which is the Universe, as the Universe is One.

Am I on the right track? Will other Jews read this and just be like *we know, duh*. Surely this is what the sages are telling us with their loophole in code – they, more than anyone,

are familiar with halachic prohibitions and still, we are commanded to encode the names of G-d on the flesh side! I don't know. Am I being silly?

No, I don't think so. You can write that if you want. It makes you sound like a Theist though, which I find surprising, is all. Send it to me so I can look over it when you're done.

I sat there for a while and stared at the *Shema*. I listened to some lady recite it on YouTube, and read hundreds of comments from philosemitic Christians who think that learning our prayers will bring them closer to their god.



Something started happening to me when I read it again on chabad.org (cringe). I looked at the *Shema* on one monitor, and looked at my notes on the Infinite on the other.

Oh no.

I simply had to run outside. I hate going outside. But I had to run out there and out the back sliding door and I hate getting grass in my hair but I had to put my face in the dirt. I put my face in the dirt and I could hear the trees. I could hear the trees talk to me and I felt like it was okay if I died, I could just go, it would be fine. The whole world was beneath me and I was

beneath the whole world. I hate the smell of fertilizer. I have never felt at peace till now. I got one-shotted by the mezuzah fucking dammit.

The Kinder surprise egg cannot be the opposite of a mezuzah because it uses concealment – a concealment of void which points to a void beyond itself, a fetishized consumer commodity. Not a name, not a Gengar, not a scroll; but not an opposite. Just something else. If we are to find the opposite of the mezuzah, it is to be the 2008 Lego Batman Minifigure Happy Meal Toy. Gaze upon it and despair:



Please understand that what you are looking at is not Lego. He's the wrong size and none of his bits come off and he doesn't interact with Lego pieces without the use of 'illegal' Lego techniques. This is the anti-mezuzah, a consumer commodity that is absolutely substance without core, and points garishly at commodities in the next dimension. Points at Lego you can actually use. Points at the Lego Batman videogame. Points at your next Happy Meal. Points at safety and toddlers choking on bits that come off other toys. This is the 'surprise' from the Kinder surprise without concealment; pure surplus. You'd think that no one would buy the Kinder surprise if they knew what absolute crap they were getting

inside, but Happy Meal toys laugh in the face of this. There is *nothing* sacred about the 2008 Lego Batman Minifigure Happy Meal Toy. I don't care that this is not real Lego. I don't care that it's not authentic. The problem here is that it points endlessly at anything but itself. Fuck whoever made this.

BOTTOM TEXT

'Ernest and Rose'

after Oscar Wilde

E: The days are getting shorter. Today I wore my striped sweater as I left the house. My tooth ached and the fresh cut grass fought with the grime on the road. I was supposed to be in class today, but I couldn't bring myself to go!

R: Are you doing okay? The mornings are cold but the sun warms up the day.

E: We're programming the grad show ceremonies, deciding how much of the school we occupy and whether we have press events or a VIP night. It's all so frustrating, it feels as though everything I've worked on has become a stall at some terrible fair. My plan was to go to Cookie's and drop off our olives, get a coffee and a croissant and go to school. But I got caught up there in conversation. We sat in the sun and I took my stripes off.

R: Good conversation?

E: Always great with her... but it still made me worried. I'm worried about hopelessness.

R: In what sense?

E: I'm not so sure, I just feel I'm talking in circles and I'm not moving anywhere.

R: What were you talking about?

E: Where art is.

R: Where art is?

E: Where art is.

R: Where is art?

E: Ah! That's exactly it. I think art is lost. There's so much that says so little, or not even says little but thinks little. Thinking in micro scales, forgetting the whole massive world we live in. Ignoring its place in the abundant sea and trying to pull itself above everything else around it. You've heard of crab theory? I am just worried that that is where contemporary art is. This constant dilution of meaning.

R: It sounds like you've been reading Baudrillard again...

E: I'm concerned! We're so lost in a sea of liberation and individualism. There's so much excess everywhere, there's too much of everything in our world, and it's all so much. There's an orgy of objects, it's all pornographic and demands your attention. Nothing is quiet and when it's quiet it is only quiet to demand something from you, to deceive you.

The opposite is also true. And this is the worst part. That objects not only have an excess of meaning or value but have *no* meaning or value to proclaim. There's no truth to objecthood anymore. No more meaningful thoughts. No thing is real.

E: And it's deep in art. Art crystallises these problems, it turns what we think into shiny objects. It transforms our ideas and our thoughts into these unfurling objects that can be viewed in such emotional and visceral ways. It's clear some of art is trying to talk about these problems but the artists aren't doing it critically enough, they become a part of the problem. The crystal takes revenge!

People explore these questions or adjacent questions in such an ironic way. Or they ask irrelevant questions. Or they just ignore all problems. They become a part of this disaster culture. They have abandoned Utopia. I go to so many galleries and get so lost in these massive questions that turn completely empty when you notice that the art object misses acknowledging that it is in itself a crystallised product of this schizo-porn world.

E: I have thought too much on “null” culture and hung around too many anarchists. This train of thought just leads me to think that all things are meaningless: there's an air of meaninglessness in this autumn breeze and I feel it blow through my wool, my skin and my bones.

R: But that art is lost is not that art is meaningless or hopeless. I understand your concern. This world is so consumed with excess and money. But to have this defeatist attitude towards art and the people who make and consume it does such a disservice to the world

of art. Which I do think is Utopic and I do think it is something which we should continue to hold dear.

R: I think that our job here is to deal with this abstract social frenzy we live in and talk about it and deal with it how you would any sort of abstraction. These problems you're talking about, the schizophrenia of our world, the community and world around us having no or too many overlapping identities, the obsessive paranoid thinking and the distrust this causes, the excess of value and obsession with money... these are all unreal, they are abstract and that's what artists deal with.

R: I think it's important for us to consider that these are truths not necessarily universal but undoubtedly truths. And the subjectivities of these truths is what we can play with and figure out how to deal with these overlapping conflicts, as an artist would do anything else.

R:

E: You really think that?

R: Yes, I think it's important.

E: Important to paint with schizo colours on a societal canvas?

R: Shut up. You know that's not what I'm saying.

E: Sorry, you're just doing what I'm scared of.

E:

R: Okay maybe I am being too vague and abstract but I reckon I can figure this out,

E: Okay.

R:

E:

R: I think that life is about giving and taking.

R: I think that my purpose is to give as much as I take and I reckon you agree with me. We are brought into this world taking and I think we spend the rest of our lives figuring out how to give back. I don't think we have to give to the things we take from necessarily, the act of giving is inspiring and in a worst case scenario will amount to your gift and best case will inspire the receiver to give again.

R: Art can be giving our all for beauty or for hope or something important. I mean that art is Utopic, or it can and should be. And I don't mean that it has to be a portrayal of Utopia but that art might be an action towards or an instruction towards action towards Utopia. Our art should give itself to the utopia we each have in our heads. Our art can and should be critical and deal with these ideas or

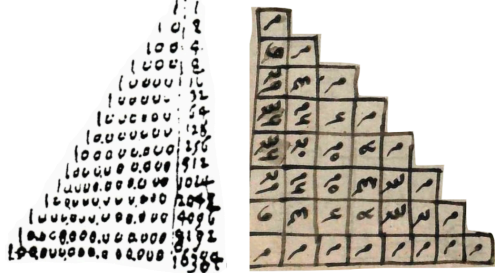
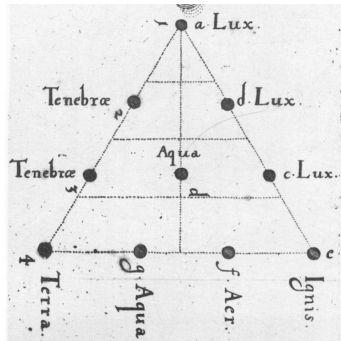
abstractions of our world. And this doesn't have to manifest as overtly political work, there are so many ways to articulate this. It just has to be thinking of something and has to be critical in some way. Or it should.

R: I think.

R: I sat out in the garden the other night, felt the breeze, and was enjoying the stars coming out. Spots in the sky, and quiet. Then the choir started. They sing almost exclusively hymns. And there's just something about how their voices fill the church that stopped me. Completely. Everything felt still, everything felt warm, the grass getting long needing a mow needing nothing else. I could spend hours listening to them. I wasn't sure how long I sat there, listening. Sitting there listening I didn't recognise any of the songs. Right then, when I was heading back inside. They sang my favourite song. Happy Birthday.

'Atelic Alchemy'

1. Alchemy rests on the belief: provided with a set of materials that allow innumerable combinations and interrelations, there must be a method of combining the materials in the right way so as to bring about a desired outcome.



✦ Demonstration: provided with lead, silver, copper, mercury, and so on, and the many means of combination: heating, cooling, dissolving, colliding, etc. which may be applied at any point and to however few or many of the materials, there is surely a way to transmute base materials into gold. The quest is called *chrysopoeia*.

1.2 The greater the set of materials, and the greater the ways to combine or relate them to one another, the greater the possibility that there is a way to achieve *any* desired outcome.

"I have all of the necessary elements.

Yet, it is their combination that eludes me."¹

* Note: medieval alchemy in its short life may not have been successful either because i. Insufficient scientific grounding/flawed theory, ii. Not enough materials or processes available, or iii. Not enough time passed for a successful trial of gold transmutation to

occur. (This is the same logic that applies to the monkeys-in-a-room-with-a-typewriter scenario.)

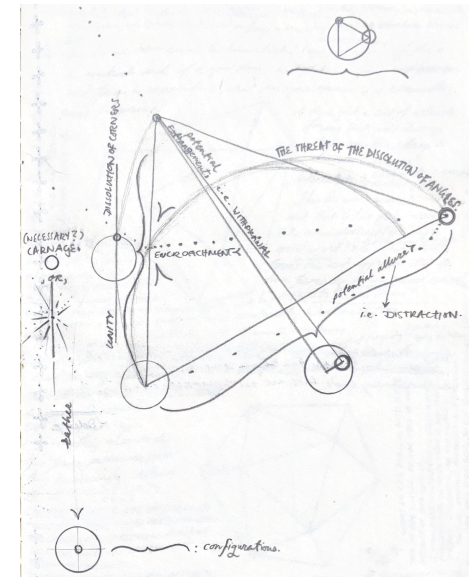
1.3 Maybe alchemists should have had more faith in themselves, or, first become immortal, such that they had sufficient time for their practice to succeed. Maybe we should have had more faith in alchemists. Option iii. in proposition 1.2. is the preferred option. Because it is the most humble, and humility is the most justified virtue because it is the most careful (what do we know?).

1.4 Although our paradigm has moved on, it remains possible that an alternate paradigm might have mounted itself on alchemical practice.

1.5. All knowledge is deeply contingent, filled up with its own historicity and unable to appraise itself. *Reason is not the same as it will be when we know more*. Any paradigm is the mercurial outline of what is currently called knowledge.

2. The human body has endless capacity to arrange itself into patterns across time. Is there a way of dancing, a routine, that weaves the lithe movements of our limbs into a symbolic order, that could – like a prayer – bring us forth into a new realm? Resurrect the dead? Turn lead into gold?

2.1 Everything significant starts with the corresponding pattern that weaves a spatio-temporal hyperplan into the right shape to harbour that



¹ Prefab Sprout, *I Trawl the Megahertz*

significant thing. This is a vessel: a moment arranged to harbour an event.

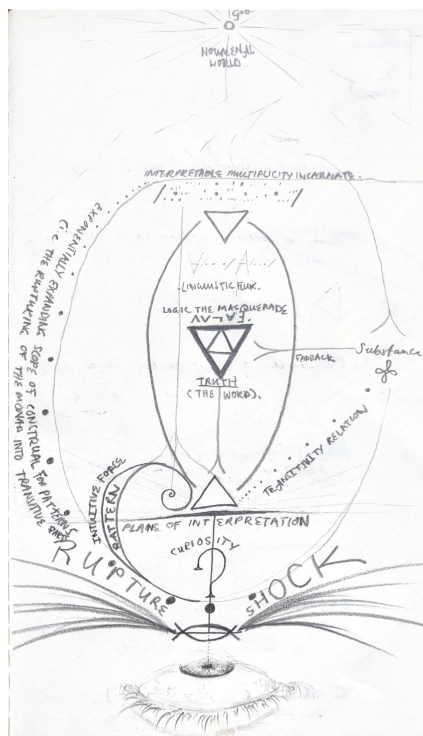
2.1.1 Consider all things and how they hang together in the broadest possible sense.² From chemical chaos arose biology, in all its vitality and persistence. Some would say chance and physics was all that was at work to weave the chemical substrate into a vessel that harbours life.

2.1.2 Perhaps it is true that matter just so happened to dance in the right way, so that life organised itself and gathered momentum from there.

2.2 Did something alchemise the stuff? It surely feels as if the singular harmonious combination was found, to create such order.

2.2.1 But the question is not necessarily who or what played alchemy with the universe? It may also be: is there another law at work, besides interactions of physics and chemistry, and a sort of chance contingency? For a moment, we might try to replace chance and see where it leads us.

3. Alchemical principles by themselves are not sufficient to bring about things like life, because alchemical practice is too restricted by its *telos*, its steps toward a final goal. Once the desired outcome is



² Wilfrid Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*

achieved, the practice ends. Gold is a single moment. Life is not like this.

3.1 There is no bright line in history that clearly separates pre-life from the advent of life. Bright means obvious, unavoidable, able to be named.

3.1.2 Things that are bright are immediately visible. We call our lines bright only in retrospect. This was to pretend they were self-evident and we just pointed at them.

3.1.3 This was to pretend we did not first, before that clinical detachment, stutter and scramble through the dense, shimmery, latent mass of an unclassified world, wiping its fertile mud off our faces with curtain-parting movements, leaving silty streaks of it in butterfly shapes on all our cheeks.

3.1.4 The intellect is world-separating. It divides and classifies. It abhors open space.

✦ Demonstration: the processual development of what we call consciousness in evolution replicates itself upon a smaller scale in the development of a simple human life. From cell, to embryo, to baby, to child, and so on. There is no *moment* at which an organism becomes conscious, it is untraceably transitive.

✦ Demonstration: a colour wheel unfurls a whirl of hues and shades that brighten or fade into each other between each diminutive point on the circle. We can splice it up into red and blue and green, but a wheel is still a wheel and is not segmented until you say so.

4. Life was always here, as much as the flux of physical matter and chemical interaction.

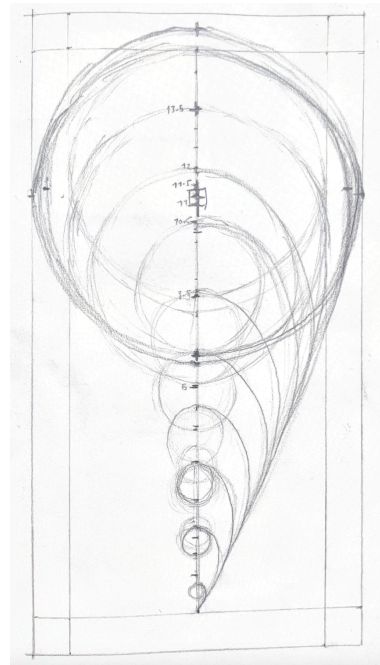
✦ Demonstration: A species evolves, eventually becoming another species. Is this the preservation of the first species or its usurpation by the

second species? Neither, it is the continuation of a singular vitality. Life doesn't reproduce identically. It changes completely, in order to preserve life. Material instances of life are not life itself, which is a more diffuse membrane.

4.1 That life follows this trajectory is not purely mechanical, it is *normative*. The norm of self-creation and proliferation through metamorphosis directs intention.

4.1.2. Life is intention.

5. One month ago in May 2025, the Large Hadron Collider at the Conseil Européen pour La Recherche Nucléaire, detected the conversion of lead into gold. They'd done it before in 2002, with smaller yield. Actually, *Chrysopoeia* was first achieved in 1980. These processes were not chemical, though, like the methods tried by alchemists. Instead, they were physical: high-energy near-miss collisions of nuclei or nucleus bombardment... Hurtling atoms at each other, facilitating rapid proton exchange. Like a very violent dance, nuclei passing bits of themselves to each other, wrenching each other's limbs off.



5.1 A scratch in a single duck embryo will not cause the destruction of the one embryo. Rather, the embryo will multiply itself down the middle, yielding two lives. There are many ways to get to a destination.

5.1.2 See prop. 5. Alchemy could have arrived at the chrysopoeitic destination, too.

6. “The all is in one”, is inscribed in the alchemical text, the *Chrysopoeia* of Cleopatra, from around the 3rd century A.D. No one alchemised non-life into life. Gold is in lead. Life is in non-life.

‘The Other Hand’

As a part of your parole you were required to complete four hundred hours of community service. You were deployed to an evacuation shelter in a rural community up north. It had been hit by Cyclone Marcia.

You drove north until you saw the carcass of a petrol station with its roof peeled back like the lid of a sardine tin. Palm fronds skittered across the road like crabs. A stop sign twisted in place, performing semaphore to nobody.

This was *phusis*. Unadulterated, form-destroying nature.

You arrived at the evacuation center. A former school, now colonised by cots, tarpaulin, and trauma.

Every weekend, you led the arts and crafts workshop for the children of the dispossessed. They were very cute. You considered going off birth control. The pill was *nomos*. Pregnancy, especially if unplanned, was *phusis*.

Phusis and *nomos*. A pair of names left to us from the ancients, like life insurance from a deadbeat parent. A legacy you didn’t ask for, but can’t afford to ignore.

Phusis and *nomos* — roughshod, they were translated into Enlightenment English as Nature versus Law. Hobbes imagined Law as civilisation’s shield against Nature. A contract, forged to keep out the wilderness. Against the *War of*

All Against All. Law was what kept the wolves at bay — both those beyond the city walls and the ones inside men’s hearts.

Nomos in Greek: law, customs, conventions. Which later became *nomen* in Latin: name. To name something is to give it law. To impose structure on the formless. To symbolise the unsymbolisable, the Real.

Marcia — a woman’s name given to a cyclone. As if naming the unnameable might help to contain it. As if it were a magic spell. *Marcia* was picked at random from a list of women’s names, which the Bureau of Meteorology keeps like a serial killer. As if calling cyclone *Marcia* — a 40-year-old woman who works in customer service — might trick it into being less destructive.

There was a girl at the shelter who reminded you of a younger version of yourself. Left-handed, possible behaviour disorders. Still reading at a kindergarten level. Her name was Marcia. Like the cyclone.

Marcia — Marcy — amused you. She assaulted the other children with traffic cones and chewed through phone cables. Found the power panel in the utility closet and caused a blackout. Lit her caseworker’s notes on fire. Carved tally marks into the drywall.

“What are you counting?” You asked.

Marcy liked to rip things up. You enabled.

You gave her paper towels, old tax notices, a copy of your ex's novel. She tore these into confetti. You tried cereal boxes and newspapers at first, but they were much too loud.

The next time you went into town to pick up airlifted rations, you bought the last pair of left-handed scissors from a looted Officeworks. It was time to graduate Marcy to the use of tools.

You knew — as grimly as any coloniser must have known — that giving someone a tool wasn't neutral. It was one of the most insidious ways to control them. Tools don't just help people survive; they teach them how to live in a particular world. How to follow its rules. Its *nomos*.

Deleuze once said that highways proved we no longer lived in societies of discipline, but in societies of control. Not through force, but through participation. Just by using something — the scissors, the road — you were already inside the system. It didn't punish you. It invited you in. That was the trick.

Marcy took to the scissors instantly. For the first time, she felt grace — not in the religious sense, but in the sense that the world seemed to make room for her. The *nomos* didn't resist her. They adapted. What a right-handed person would call ergonomic, Marcy felt as kindness.

You gave her a stack of old National Geographics and a scrapbook. She cut out birds, gemstones, child soldiers. You taught her how to press each image flat with her right hand while gluing with her left.

A place to keep the things she loved. Where the things she loved weren't always trying to get away.

Lacan's big idea — well, Kant's before him — was that you can't have nature (*phusis*) without structure (*nomos*). No raw experience without some kind of frame. No Real without the Imaginary, the Symbolic. No reality without the systems we use to make sense of it.

The ancients thought the ideal society was one where those two things worked together — the wildness of life guided by a gentle order. The Taoists called it *wu wei*. Doing without doing. Action without effort. Frictionless movement. Like a stream moving around a rock. Like a child using tools designed with her in mind.

The state sent pallets of bottled water, and a single grief counsellor. Power restoration was triaged by postcode wealth. Helicopters did flyovers for photo ops, and at the local RSL, two bureaucrats handed out Woolworths gift cards.

Meanwhile, Marcy built shrines in her scrapbook.

Well. That would've been nice, wouldn't it? If that were the end of the story. If you'd tamed the wayward child, clothed her from the woods and straightened her spine. If the left-handed scissors had sorted her out for life. If oppositional defiance had structural causes. If removing the cause of disadvantage meant removing the antisocial behaviour.

But Marcy kept acting up.

She pantsed the other kids. Scrawled on sleeping adults in Sharpie. Bit her caseworker until she bled — then said, “This one’s infected. We have to put it down.” The caseworker revoked her Skype privileges with Mum. Marcy retaliated by snipping the generator wiring.

You took her scissors. She sobbed so miserably you almost gave them back. You wanted to scoop her into your arms. Give her everything you never got. But then you remembered: part of the job meant modelling boundaries. Lacan’s tripartite pun: *nom du père, nomos du père, non du père*. The Name-of-the-Father was also the Law-of-the-Father — and the “No” of the Father.

You had to teach her the most important lesson of all — how to take no for an answer.

And so what did Marcy do? She did a runner. Took off for the hills in the middle of the night and never came back. Running away. It was the child’s most definitive idea of rebellion, just short of a suicide attempt. Depriving the Other of yourself. A performance and a question rolled into one: *Who am I to the Other?*

The next day — and for months afterward — there were cops at the shelter. Dogs. You were taken in for questioning, then acquitted. *Sixty Minutes* filmed a segment that never aired, turfed from the lineup for a viral cat. Marcy’s mum died in hospital, not from grief, but from underfunding. Within a year, the country had forgotten the whole thing.

By some miracle, your parole remained intact. You completed your four hundred hours and got a job as a tax agent at a local accountancy firm, one with truly horrific graphic design. You stayed in town. And whenever you banked even the smallest scrap of leave, you drove.

You got into your used Toyota Echo, that flat, nauseous, champagne-coloured vehicle, and went inland. Past the petrol station, refurbished by Shell. Past the school that once doubled as an evacuation shelter, now half-slated for demolition but untouched—because no one wanted to deal with the paperwork around asbestos. You drove until your vision blurred, until you saw angels in the streetlights, and your eyelids sank low.

A storm was picking up. Not a cyclone. Just a storm. You pulled over and banged on the GPS to see if it would come back to life. It didn’t. You checked into a motel. No other guests. You dialled a number into the landline just to see if it worked. It might’ve been Dad’s. You fell asleep to the sound of the phone ringing out.

In the morning, you woke to the rafters creaking. You tried calling the front desk to report a leak in the ceiling. There was no front desk.

You wandered the premises in the torrential downpour, too dissociated to feel the water seeping through your knockoff neoprene. You were checking out the facilities. You located the pool behind an abandoned kiosk with a peeling vinyl sign that read “ rt Cabana,” barely clinging to the awning. You couldn’t

tell if the water was clear — the surface kept breaking under the rain.

You jumped in fully clothed and let yourself melt. You voided the breath from your lungs so you could sink like a stone, curling into a foetal position. You thought about nothing but the cold. You waited until your body and the water were one temperature.

Being in the pool while it rained had the strange calm of a sensory deprivation tank — amniotic, soothing. A simulation of *das Ding*, the lost wholeness the subject can't return to. All the same, all One. No me, no you, no here, no there. Perfect oblivion.

You wondered if this was what it felt like for Marcy, the first time she used those left-handed scissors. You consoled yourself imagining that the tool had filled her Lack — that child and object had fused in a moment of transhumanist *jouissance*. That they'd disappeared into Heideggerian use. The tool doing its job so seamlessly it stopped being seen as a tool at all.

The moment you reflect on it — turn it into a metaphor, an image, into Art — the thing stops being itself. You've ruined its *equipmently nature*. You've destroyed it by noticing it. Maybe that's what happened with the scissors. A wanker like you came along.

Maybe that's what happened with Marcy. Maybe once you start *thinking* the child, you stop seeing her. Maybe there is such a

thing as too much *nomos* — too much theory, too much expectation, too many frameworks. Maybe Marcy had just wanted to be recognised on her own terms — not as the conclusion to your thought experiment.

Phusis, for the Greeks, was the force of becoming. The push. The self-moving principle of change. *Nomos* was the response — the form, the shape, the frame offered in return by consciousness. There is no colour without a seeing eye.

You hoped Marcy had gone into *phusis*. That from the fluorescent cave of the evac shelter — with its shadow puppets of bureaucracy, all those tapped-out caseworkers — she'd emerged somewhere with sun. Somewhere where things came into being and passed away on their own terms. Where she had autonomy. Where she could be the maker of her own forms.

You knew it was wishful thinking. Marcy had been failed — by systems, by circumstance, and by you. You hadn't just violated the *nomos* of the state, but something worse: the law you'd given yourself. You weren't a consequentialist; you didn't think you *caused* her disappearance. But it was a sign. Something had gone wrong. And someone should be punished for it.

But not today. Today, you waited. Because *phusis* moves beneath *nomos*. Because even in stillness, things are becoming. You were okay to let change come when it came. There might be other ways to repair. And now you're drowning in self-loathing at the bottom of a motel pool.